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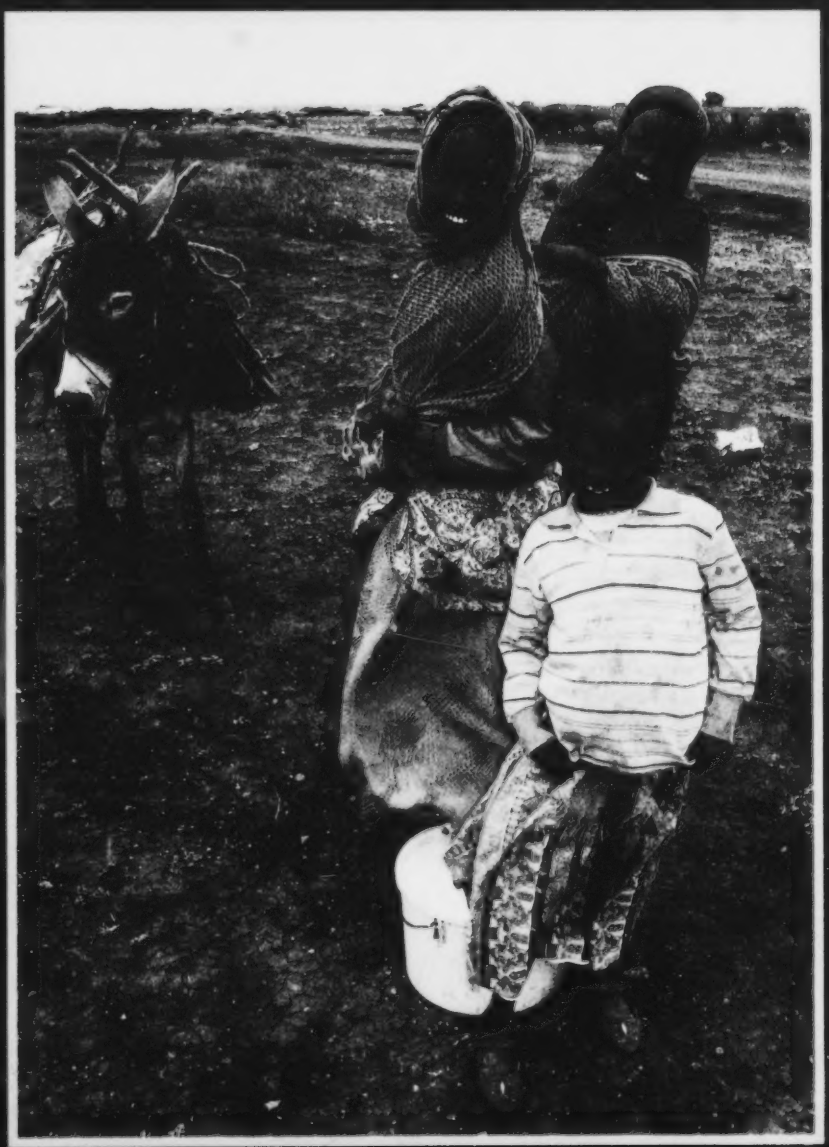
# Refugees



UNHCR
United Nations
High Commissioner
for Refugees

# CONTENTS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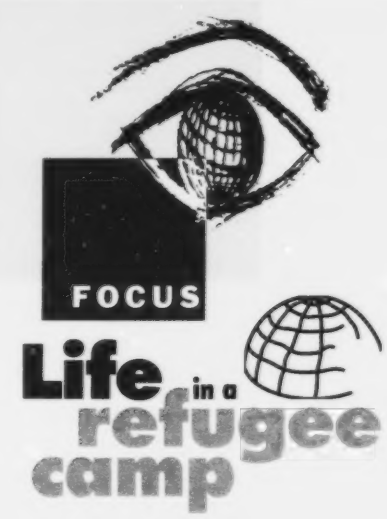
**Cover:** Somali refugees on their way home to Hartisheik camp after gathering charcoal at a nearby forest.

Photo: UNHCR/W. Sassi





**• ALL BUT FORGOTTEN**
Once one of the world's largest, the Somali refugee camp at Hartisheik has fallen on hard times. When the television cameras move on to other emergencies, UNHCR and the refugees remain, out of sight, out of mind **4**

**• A CAMP IS BORN**
Despite careful planning, some refugee camps spring up seemingly on their own, influenced by many factors, including geography, economics, political and security concerns and — last but not least — sheer necessity and desperation **8**

**• NO PLACE LIKE HOME**
Shelter is one of the basics in any refugee situation, and its provision can be a matter of life and death. UNHCR attempts to ensure that housing is suitable to local conditions and traditions **12**

**• PHOTO ESSAY: FACES OF HARTISHEIK**
The images of Somali refugees at Hartisheik reflect life in a camp and the constant struggle for survival. Each year, raising funds for the refugees' care is becoming ever more difficult **14**

**• FEEDING THE HUNGRY**
The World Food Program provides the food needs in UNHCR's camps worldwide. The two agencies agree on food baskets for refugees, which vary from country to country **16**

**• FAMILIAR IMAGES**
UNHCR doctors ensure that health and nutrition policies are implemented by host governments and non-governmental organizations. Sometimes, efforts at improving health care are frustrated by other factors in a camp situation **18**

**• VIDEO VERSUS TRADITION**
A traditional rite of passage among Somali women is coming to an end with a training program and an information campaign designed to prevent the mutilation of refugee girls **19**

**• ESCAPE FROM IGNORANCE**
Children's access to education is a primary concern in refugee camps. Courses offered normally follow the curriculum in the refugees' country of origin **21**

**• NARY A DROP TO DRINK**
In any refugee camp, a good, reliable source of clean water must be available. But sometimes, refugee camps end up on impossibly poor sites **22**

**• 'THINK SOLUTIONS'**
In the post-Cold War era, it has become increasingly difficult to raise funds for the care and maintenance of refugees. It is now essential to try and help refugees become self-reliant at the very first opportunity **24**

**• PREVENTING AND REPAIRING THE DAMAGE**
The mitigation of environmental damage is one of the priority items in today's refugee situations. Donors recognize that moderate expenditure can save enormous cost in repairing damaged lands **26**

**• WHEN IT'S TIME TO GO HOME**
Refugees usually go back home when the fears that drove them into exile are gone. Often, a new kind of fear intervenes — that of returning to a ruined homeland and starting over again **27**

**• THE LAST TO LEAVE**
A large majority of the Somali refugees — the pastoral nomads and the affluent — have returned spontaneously to their country. The very poor are stuck in refugee camps **29**

*A Somali refugee woman collects water from a catchment basin at Hartisheik camp in the semi-arid region of eastern Ethiopia.*

# The inside story

Life in a refugee camp. The images of sprawling, smoke-filled tent cities are familiar enough to anyone who watches the nightly television news. But the reality of life in such a place — day after day, year after year — is almost unimaginable for most of us.

In this issue we take a close look at what goes on inside a refugee camp — how, why and for whom a camp is set up; the various sectors like water, health, food, sanitation and shelter; programs for those refugees requiring special attention; the impact on surrounding communities and the environment; the difficulties in maintaining international interest and support; and, last but not least, the often evasive solutions.

Although no two camps are alike, we chose to focus on one long-established camp in Ethiopia -- Hartisheik — to illustrate some of the common challenges UNHCR faces in its work with large refugee populations around the world.

While most people tend to think of camps when they think of refugees, it's worth noting that UNHCR actually prefers not to put people in large camps if it can be avoided. In many countries, for example, refugees live and work side-by-side with the local population. This is the preferred way of dealing with refugees, until such time as they can finally go home. But when huge numbers of refugees suddenly converge on a neighboring country, there is often little choice but to establish camps.

The stories on the following pages were written by UNHCR staffers Fernando del Mundo, Peter Kessler and Mahary Maasho, who, along with photographer Wendy Stone, spent a week in Hartisheik and the surrounding area examining every aspect of life in a refugee camp. ■

The Somalis of Hartisheik

# All but forgotten

The Somali refugee camp at Hartisheik, in a dusty corner of eastern Ethiopia, has fallen on hard times. The blue and white tarpaulins distributed by UNHCR in 1988 to enable the first wave of refugees to cover their dome-shaped huts, or *tukuls*, have been torn to shreds by the fierce winds that repeatedly lash the region. Today, the plastic sheeting has been replaced by tattered wheat sacks sewn together.

Once one of the largest refugee camps in the world, Hartisheik has been reduced to small clusters of ragged huts scattered over 15 kms of the Ethiopian frontier. About 59,000 Somalis remain there. They say they cannot go home because conditions in their country remain unstable. But international donor support for the 8-year-old camp and its struggling population continues to wane, and nearly everything is in short supply. The refugees get little food and water, and their plastic roof covers have not been replaced.

"We are told that the world has forgotten the Somalis here because of what's happening on the other side, in Somalia itself," says 37-year-old Mariam Abdi-Hassan. "They say there's too much fighting there. There is no reconciliation. But we are the victims of war. Why should we be punished for what is going on on the other side?"

Although no two refugee situations are identical, there are many others that parallel Hartisheik's sorry state. The scenario is often the same. When the appetite for news slows and the television cameras move on to other emergencies, UNHCR and the refugees remain — out of sight, out of mind. Aid operations shift from emergency status to routine care and maintenance programs for the refugee population. The search for durable solutions — particularly repatriation — proves fruitless and, as time drags on, donor fatigue sets in. Lack of funding compels UNHCR to cut down on assistance programs. First affected are unfortunately programs for children — education and other support work. Eventually, the stage is reached when only "life-sustaining activities" can be carried out in the camps. A similar slide can occur when a refugee program is winding down, and there are fewer compelling reasons for the refugees to remain in the camps.

What has happened in Hartisheik is now beginning to happen in Zaire and Tanzania, where increasingly frustrated donors see no solution in sight for some 1.7 million Rwandan refugees who continue to languish in huge border camps. On top of

***Funding difficulties have prevented the replacement of plastic sheeting distributed when the refugees first arrived eight years ago.***

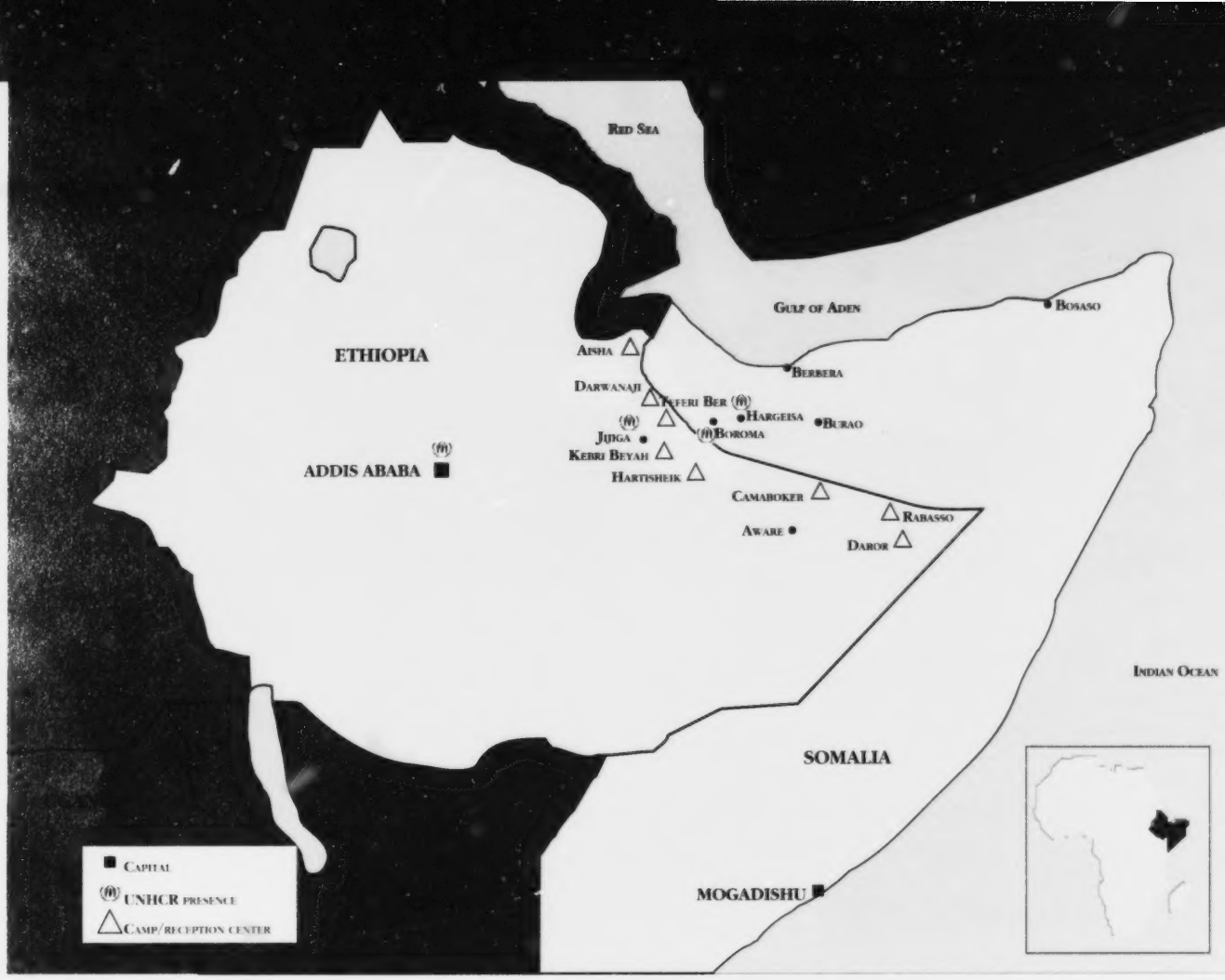
this frustration and declining interest, there is also the cold, hard reality that UNHCR has many other responsibilities around the world — some 26 million refugees, returnees and displaced persons in all.

The Somali refugees began arriving in Hartisheik in 1988, at the start of the rebellion against the Siad Barre regime that was triggered by various clans vying for power. By the time the government in Mogadishu fell in 1991 and famine subsequently swept the country, close to 1 million Somalis had fled to neighboring countries. Of that peak number, about 600,000 came to Ethiopia, including 220,000 who settled in Hartisheik camp. The majority of these refugees have returned home spontaneously, but there still are some 426,000 in the asylum countries, including 275,000 in Hartisheik and seven other camps in Ethiopia. Kenya hosts 126,000 Somali refugees, Djibouti 20,000 and Yemen 5,000.

Every time a sign of peace emerged in Somalia and refugees in Ethiopia began going home spontaneously, UNHCR drew up repatriation plans. But each time these plans were about to be implemented, new clan skirmishes broke out; those who had gone back had to move again even before they could begin a new life.

The latest round of fighting occurred in November 1994 in Hargeisa, where the uprising against the Siad Barre regime had started six years earlier, and spread east to Burao. This resulted in a new influx of 90,000 refugees to Ethiopia and compelled UNHCR to abandon its repatriation program scheduled for later that year. Money earmarked for repatriation was used to care for the new arrivals. Today, there are strong indications that order has been restored in many areas of Somalia over the past year, and once again UNHCR is pursuing its repatriation plans.

The northwest region, for example, has been relatively untouched ▶




▶by the continuing clan wars in the Mogadishu area in the southern part of Somalia. A breakaway Republic of Somaliland has been proclaimed in the northwest of the country. Officials in the northwest acknowledge that there still are tensions in some parts of the region, but on the whole a central administration is functioning and order has been restored.

Hargeisa is the capital of the self-proclaimed republic and is slowly rising from the ashes of war. There are no guns visible in the streets. The livestock market is bustling with merchants buying goats, camels and cattle to be taken to the port cities of Berbera and Djibouti for export to the Middle East. Buildings are being constructed in the nearby city of Boroma.

Most of the refugees in Hartisheik and other camps in eastern Ethiopia — Teferi Ber, Kebri Beyah, Darwanaji, Camaboker, Rabasso, Daror and Aisha — originated from Hargeisa and other urban centers in northwest Somalia. They often visit their home towns in Somalia and report that travel by bus or on foot is safe.

On a bright July morning along the dirt road from Teferi Ber, a group of Somali refugees was heading toward the town of Boroma in Somalia to sell sacks of wheat flour loaded on the backs of six donkeys. They said they purchase the wheat from their fellow refugees and travel to Boroma once every two weeks to sell it and buy goods which they then sell at the refugee camp in Ethiopia.

At another border crossing point in northwest Somalia, a Somali woman refugee was walking back to Darwanaji camp in Ethiopia after a visit to Boroma to ask for help from an uncle. She said she visits her uncle in Boroma, a half day's walk, once every three months.

Local officials in northwest So-

malia say the security situation in the region has improved markedly in recent months. There have been no reports of major clan fighting, but there are still threats of clashes that can prevent return. At least three people were treated for wounds sustained in land mine explosions over the past several months. More than a million land mines litter Somalia, and regularly cause casualties. A British agency, Rimfire, in coordination first with UNHCR and later with the U.N. Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM), conducted mine clearance in the country, including the Hargeisa region, beginning in 1992. UNHCR contributed equipment and protective clothing to Rimfire, which also trained local staff to do the job. Authorities in Hargeisa now say the army is dealing with the problem, but point out that getting rid of mines is a difficult and costly exercise. They say residents know where these mines are and try to avoid them.

Without official recognition and assistance, the breakaway government has done a remarkable job of rebuilding from scratch. It has appealed for development funds, saying that rehabilitation and repatriation programs must go hand in hand.

"There are not only physical mines, but also psychological mines that are preventing us from doing more for our people," said Mohammed Barud Ali, a Dutch-educated engineer who is minister of resettlement, rehabilitation and reconstruction in the self-styled republic. Ali, who lived an exile's life in the United States for eight years, holds office at the former national security building where he was once detained and tortured by the ousted Siad Barre government.

Ali said he was aware that only the well-off refugees had repatriated and that the poor remained in the camps. Unemployment is high in northwest Somalia and for refugees to return and stay it is essential that livelihood opportunities be created for them, he said.

As part of preparations for repatriation, UNHCR has spent $13.8 million in northwest Somalia on "quick impact projects," or QIPs, since 1992. These projects include the construction or repair of hospitals, schools, water systems and facilities at border entry points where returnees will be received once the repatriation program gets off the ground. But a lot more has to be done in Somalia to rebuild the ruined infrastructure, provide jobs and create opportunities for returnees and residents alike.

In a series of meetings, Tarik Muftic, UNHCR's repatriation officer in Jijiga, Ethiopia, urged Somali refugees to visit their homes in northwest Somalia and find out for themselves whether it is time to return. He said funds for the refugees were drying up and they could not count indefinitely on donor assistance.

"There is no more reason for some of these refugees to stay," he said. "But those who cannot go back because of the security situation in their villages can remain in the camps." And then, he says, donors should have a closer look at their conditions and be assured that they are providing assistance from a purely humanitarian perspective.

UNHCR/W. Stone

***The hospital at Boroma in northwest Somalia is one of the facilities UNHCR has repaired in preparation for the repatriation of Somali refugees.***

# A camp is born

Some refugee camps are carefully planned and some spring up seemingly on their own. Their location can be determined by myriad factors, including geography, geology, economics, political and security concerns, resources and — last but not least — sheer necessity and desperation.

In Hartisheik's case, market economics and clan tradition played a crucial role. A stroll through its refugee-run central market illustrates the importance of this grassroots commercialism even today — eight years after the founding of what became one of the world's largest camps.

You can find almost anything you need at the Hartisheik market: imported clothes; jogging shoes; radios and televisions; auto spare parts and the ubiquitous khat — a stimulant from the *Catha Edulis* plant that grows abundantly in the nearby fields.

Most of the goods are smuggled into Hartisheik, primarily from the Somali ports of Berbera and Bossaso. They are bought by bargain hunters on either side of the Ethiopia-Somalia border. Buyers from the Ethiopian side come as far away as the capital, Addis Ababa, a day-long trip overland.

The market — a motley collection of mud and corrugated-tin huts lining windswept streets that are muddy during the rainy season and dusty and dry the rest of the year — lies at the very center of Hartisheik and of the lives of its residents.

Refugee Somali merchants and traders from Hargeisa began building the market in May 1988. Carrying their merchandise with them, they fled the fighting when the Siad Barre regime in Mogadishu sent warplanes to put down a clan uprising in Hargeisa, Somalia's second largest city.

The refugees first went to Harshin, an Ethiopian village about 25 kms

UNHCR M Eaton 97

***A sign in Ambaric and English says Hartisheik camp is being administered by the Ethiopian Ministry of Internal Affairs.***

from the Somali border. UNHCR deployed its staff there to care for the arrivals, including Ethiopian refugees in Somalia who had fled the Mengistu regime in Ethiopia in the 1980s. When Harshin was full, UNHCR looked for a larger camp with available water. But the goverment refused to grant the required space further inland, where there was adequate water. It still harbored suspicions against the Somalis against whom it had gone to war for control of the disputed Ogaden region in eastern Ethiopia in the 1970s.

The Ethiopian government decided to settle the refugees at Hartisheik, 50 kms east of Harshin. But even before UNHCR could evacuate the refugees at Harshin, thousands of Somalis — many of them women and children — had begun settling at Hartisheik.

International conventions, particularly those followed in member states of the Organization of African Unity, call for the establishment of refugee camps within a reasonable distance — usually interpreted to mean about 50 kms — from the border, for security reasons. But these standards cannot always be followed.

In early 1994 in central Africa, for example, UNHCR sent emergency teams to look into suitable sites in four neighboring countries when it became apparent that the civil war in Rwanda could produce large numbers of refugees. But when the Rwandan refugees came in overwhelming numbers, circumstances forced UNHCR to build camps close to the border. In Zaire's volcanic, eastern region, there was practically no space to settle 1 million Rwandan refugees. Despite tremendous obstacles, UNHCR was able to give, with donor support, an acceptable level of assistance to the Rwandan refugees, at least at the outset, before funding problems came up this year.

The decision by the refugees to settle at Hartisheik was in part influenced by clan traditions and practice. Although they speak a single language and share the Moslem religion, Somalis are divided into numerous clans. Political and geographic divisions mean nothing to them. Mostly nomadic, they take their herd where there's water, within the clan territory where they feel safe. They call it "following the cloud."

The refugees at Hartisheik belong to the Issack clan, whose territory covers parts of both Somalia and Ethiopia, including Hartisheik. Clan members include both Ethiopians and Somalis. They help one another, according to clan custom. Thus, the Hartisheik refugees are relatively comfortable in their surroundings. For them Hartisheik is home, as Hargeisa was. Unlike most Somalis, who are nomadic, the Hartisheik refugees were city dwellers in Hargeisa and other urban centers in northwest Somalia. As former shop owners, traders and laborers, the market at Hartisheik offers them employment and other opportunities that they cannot find today in Hargeisa.

Unlike most Somalis, who are nomadic, the Hartisheik refugees were city dwellers in Hargeisa and other urban centers in northwest Somalia.

In 1988, Hartisheik was just a small village of four or five huts. The villagers raised goats and camels. There was little vegetation in the surrounding grassy plains and only one water well before refugees swarmed into the area over a three-month period beginning in May. Many of the arrivals were wounded, hungry and exhausted from the long trek. "People were dying like flies," recalled Ali Gulaid, a Somali-American from Houston, Texas, who went to Hartisheik to look for his parents. "That was the most depressing thing I saw in my life."

As many as 400,000 people — Somalis and Ethiopians — were estimated to have received aid at Hartisheik alone during the emergency. It was difficult to distinguish between ▶

▶ refugees, returnees and locals — all of them were in dire straits. Later, in 1991, an official census put the number of Somali refugees at Hartisheik at 220,000.

UNHCR moved into the camp as the refugees flooded in. Its staff planned and coordinated programs implemented by non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These activities included organizing shelter, health and sanitation services, food distribution and setting up water facilities. Because the region was semi-arid, the first priority was to look for water. Permission had to be secured from the government to truck water from Jijiga, 60 kms away. It was granted on condition UNHCR keep the dirt road in shape. Then 35 water depots, including nine bladders, and 978 taps were installed. Eight tankers brought water daily from Jijiga. The water source later shifted to newly drilled boreholes at Jerrer valley to avoid depletion of Jijiga's water supply and increase the cost effectiveness of tanker operations.

UNHCR site planners came and plastic sheeting was distributed. But the refugees set up their usually mobile huts wherever they thought it was convenient. Organizing them was a tough job. Constructing buildings also proved difficult because of lack of water; pre-fabricated materials had to be brought in, along with heavy equipment. Two hospitals and two schools were built in 1991.

UNHCR's main implementing partners were Save the Children

## All in my thought

In front of my tilting cage,
that little hut of plastics,
so not to suffer from loneliness,
I travelled far and wide,
all in my thought.

I went back to the remote past,
our home and its vicinities,
grandma and her stories
of my great-grandfather,
those mighty warriors
from whom I inherited
intolerance and pride.
I travelled far and wide,
all in my thought.

I went far into the future,
into my dreams and high hopes.
To see what was there,
where this changeless passage of time,
where this endless kick of my heels,
could possibly one day lead.
I travelled far and wide,
all in my thought
I have also travelled to eternity,
to see my soul at the end of this mess.
I travelled far and wide,
all in my thought.

It is woe
to think of a day
in the realm of thought, dominated
by the affluent and the politician.
It is woe to think of it.
For on that day,
there will be no place to take refuge.
No journey will there be
in one's own thought.

Neither police, nor boundary,
nor citizenship and poverty,
nor politics and creed,
prevented my good journey.
I travelled far and wide,
all in my thought

**Gidi Abamegal, Ethiopia**

**This poem is reprinted from "Tilting Cages," a collection of refugee writings edited by Naomi Flutter and Carl Solomon. The two are Australian volunteers who spent some time in Kenya under UNHCR's Camp Sadako project which allows youths to experience life with refugees.**

Fund (U.K.), which was in charge of feeding programs for children and mothers; CARE, which trucked water and maintained roads; OXFAM, which built the water storage systems and pipes; Handicap International, which took care of invalids; and the government Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA), which was responsible for overall camp management, including food distribution, education and health and sanitation services.

By September 1994, conditions in Somalia appeared to be improving, raising hopes that the refugees could soon return home. In fact, tens of thousands had already gone back spontaneously. Repatriation plans were drawn up by UNHCR. In another census, this one carried out in one day under the watchful eye of Ethiopian troops who ringed Hartisheik and seven other camps, relief workers counted a total of 184,900 refugees, including more than 44,000 in Hartisheik. Unfortunately, large-scale organized repatriation never took place as fighting broke out in Somalia once again and new refugees came out. Hartisheik now has a population of 59,000.

Today, with UNHCR support and coordination, Hartisheik is run by 64 ARRA workers, assisted by 261 refugees. The ARRA has taken over most of the work of the NGOs. UNHCR coordinates the various programs and monitors their implementation. Since 1988 UNHCR has spent $124 million on Hartisheik. With each passing year, however, money is becoming harder to find.

***Enterprising Somali refugees sell corn at the town market to earn money to buy household needs.***

Shelter

# No place like home

It is a far cry from the stone house they left behind in Somalia, but the small hut with a floor area roughly the size of a ping-pong table is home for Sofia Abdi Ahmad, her husband and seven children in Ethiopia's Hartisheik refugee camp.

It was a lot more comfortable when they first arrived in 1988 after fleeing the civil war in northwest Somalia. The blue and white plastic sheeting UNHCR had given them covered the dome-shaped hut, or *tukul*, and protected the family from the elements.

Violent winds blasting Hartisheik have since torn the tarpaulin to shreds, although its tattered remains can still be seen woven into a patchwork quilt of old rags and wheat sacks that cover the *tukul* from the ground up. Lack of funding for the Horn of Africa operation has prevented UNHCR from replacing the 8-year-old plastic, although some new sheets have now begun to arrive.

"The place leaks. Often, we spend the night on our feet when it rains,"

> Shelter is one of the basics in any refugee situation, and its provision can be a matter of life and death.

says Abdi Ahmad, a former school teacher from Hargeisa in northwest Somalia. She is standing in the small entrance that opens into the kitchen, which is separated from the main quarters by a decaying curtain.

The hut looks neat and tidy, its earthen floor covered with plastic mats. The family's possessions include two suitcases, five pillows that have seen better times and some battered and smoke-blackened pots and pans. A charcoal-burning stove provides warmth from the cold and rain outside. The stove is one of the prized possessions Abdi Ahmad carried in her flight from Hargeisa.

Most *tukuls* in the neighborhood are small and spartan inside. Each has a stove and straw mat. Latrines, covered by twigs and leaves, are constructed beside the houses. There's plenty of space between clumps of houses. Most refugees have their own gardens, planted with maize and vegetables during the rainy season. It's not much, but it's home — for the time being.

Shelter is one of the basics in any refugee situation, and its provision can be a matter of life and death in areas of extreme weather. UNHCR employs shelter specialists and site planners who try to ensure that housing is suitable to local conditions and traditions. But there is one constant in all refugee camps — no one lives in luxury.

One of the most common emergency shelter materials provided by UNHCR is plastic sheeting. The agency has purchased tons of it. Emblazoned with UNHCR's sheltering hands logo, it covers tens of thousands of shattered windows in Bosnia-Herzegovina and hundreds of thousands of refugee huts from Burundi to Bangladesh.

Over the last several years, UNHCR has been distributing a special type of plastic sheeting that holds up well under the hot, harsh weather conditions of Africa and Asia, says Wolfgang Neumann, UNHCR's senior physical planner. Each sheet is 4 by 5 meters and costs $7.

Shelter for refugees in most countries usually means a space measuring 3.5 square meters per family. But in places with cold winters, such as Bosnia and Azerbaijan, the space can

measure up to 5 or 6 square meters and normally includes a small kitchen and toilet.

"People in cold climates have to use buildings all the time. But in a number of African villages, the house does not serve the same purpose as in Europe or in Central Asia," says Neumann. "In many places, the house is just a dark hole, no window, only the door. It is a place to store property, to sleep. It is not a place to live."

The nomadic people in the Horn of Africa carry their *tukuls* on their camels and set them up whenever it's convenient, says Neumann.

While UNHCR has certain standards for shelter and for planning and laying out a camp, they are not always met.

"Standards are there to remind people of what we should aim at, but we cannot say that we have always reached these objectives," Neuman says. He mentions eastern Zaire's Goma region, home to 720,000 of the 1.7 million Rwandan refugees in three countries of the Great Lakes region of Africa. "Land is simply not available there," he says.

But the agency does its best with limited resources, and it tries to provide materials with which the refugees are familiar. In Southeast Asia, UNHCR has provided bamboo and palm leaves as part of shelter packages. In Iran, Afghan refugees build mud domes that are warm in winter and cool in summer. UNHCR provides them with doors and windows.

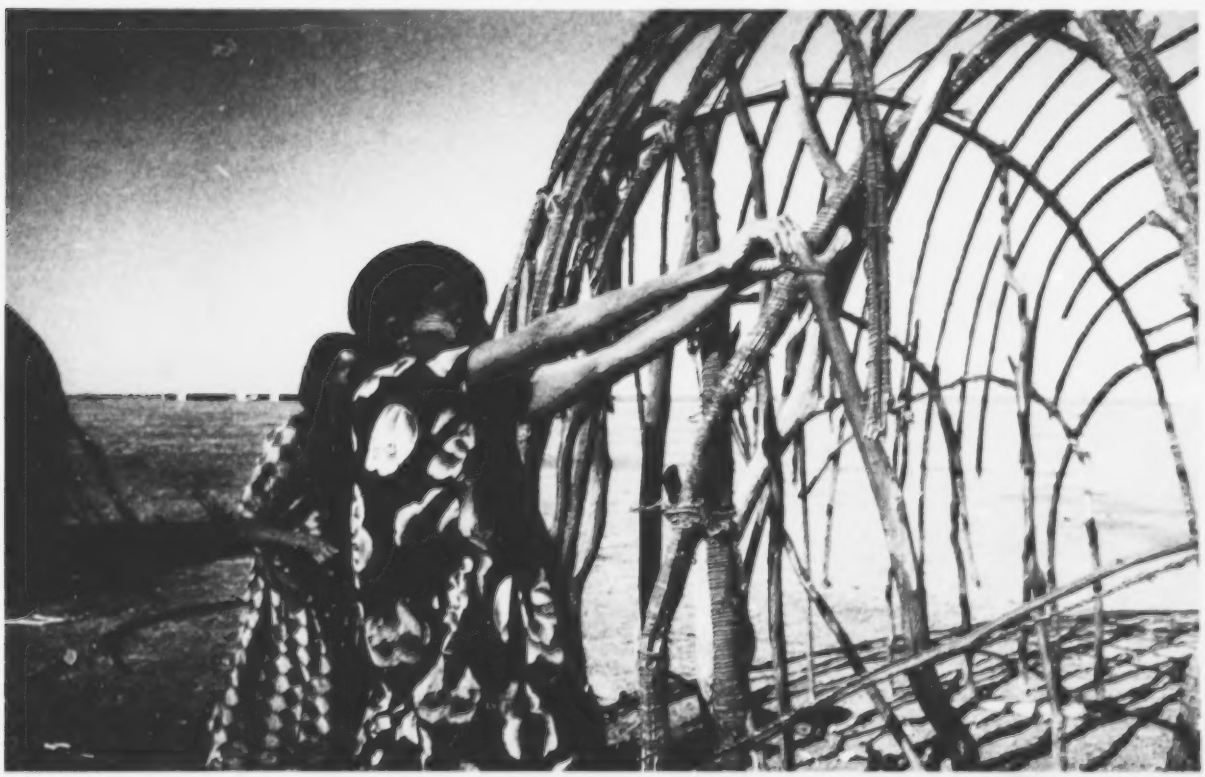
Neuman says in many situations, shelter is aimed specifically at keeping people dry in the rainy season and cool and shaded during the dry season. "Our intention is to save lives... We want people to stay alive, to stay healthy," he says.

"Hartisheik is a very dry area. You have rains there over a very short period. During the rest of the year, there's very little rainfall. The shelter is more for shade and protection from dust, while in Goma, it is a place to sleep at night."

Despite their humble dwellings, refugees try to make life in a camp as livable as possible. Abdi Ahmad's tidy hut reflects this pride. Today, she works as an assistant in the hospital at Hartisheik. Her husband, a former university professor, earns a living now delivering water by wheelbarrow to neighbors.

Abdi Ahmad wants nothing more than to return to Hargeisa and go back to the house she left behind. "I would like to start all over again," she says. Her husband went to northwest Somalia in July, to look for a job so all the family can go back. It's now just a matter of time before Abdi Ahmad and her family will finally be back in a real home, where they belong.

***Most Somali huts, called tukuls, are small and movable, allowing the refugees to set them up in places they consider convenient.***



UNHCR/M. Gomez

An elderly Somali outside his hut.

Collecting firewood takes hours because areas surrounding the camp have been denuded ov the years. UNHCR is promoting reforestation around refugee camps and providing alternati stoves and fuel.

Caring for the sick and elderly is one of the services at the camp.

Health workers concerned with nutrition look after refugee infants.

Most refugee families are composed of five or more children.

A refugee boy dressed to go to school.

The work is never done for Somali refugee women.

Food

# Feeding the hungry

News of a sudden reduction in food rations hit Hartisheik camp in mid-July. Because of shortages due to lack of donor pledges to the World Food Program's food pipeline for refugees in Ethiopia, individual cereal rations were being reduced from 500 grams to 375 grams per day. And, for the first time since their arrival eight years ago, the refugees also were told they were going to receive sorghum instead of the usual wheat grain from WFP, the United Nations' food arm.

"We are going to die," said a bearded Somali after a meeting called by the Ethiopian camp administrator to announce to a group of about 100 refugee leaders the WFP's food reserve position. "Send us home to Somalia," he cried.

With wheat grain, the refugees say they are able to prepare several types of meals, but with sorghum only one kind. Sorghum is a staple meal in southern Somalia and has the same nutritive value as wheat. But these refugees have been receiving wheat grain or wheat flour for years and say it would take time for them to get used to sorghum.

What was left unsaid by the refugees was that wheat grain sells for more in the market than sorghum. Refugees are known to sell part of their ration to vary their diet — a practice that is looked upon with an understandable degree of tolerance by some aid providers, but with dismay by food donors.

In a place where there is nothing, food is everything. The refugees sell part of the ration to buy other needs. Food also is used as an incentive to spur people to become productive by encouraging such programs as "Food for Work." It is also used to promote repatriation. For example, large numbers of Mozambican refugees in Malawi decided to return home several years ago when it was announced that food would be distributed in Mozambique instead of the refugee camps.

> Whether the entire food package is delivered to refugees ultimately depends on donors making good on their pledges to the World Food Program.

Under agreements that have been refined through the years — the last time in January 1994 — WFP provides the food needs in UNHCR's camps worldwide. WFP seeks donations in cash or in kind, arranges for transport of food from the donor country or from the market where it is bought, and ensures storage and handling right up to delivery to the camps. There, UNHCR's implementing partner — either the government or non-governmental agencies — receives, transports and distributes it to leaders of groups of refugee families or to individual family heads. UNHCR is pushing for a greater role for women in the camps and efforts are being promoted to hand over food rations to women instead of men.

UNHCR and WFP agree on food baskets for refugees and returnees in different countries for a given period. The basket varies from country to country, depending on the recipients' eating habits, culture, customs, traditions and, most important, state of health. Whether the entire food package agreed upon is delivered to refugees ultimately depends to a large extent on donors making good on their pledges to WFP.

In Ethiopia, UNHCR and WFP decided in 1989 on a general daily food basket that includes 500 grams of cereals, 25 grams of oil, 20 grams of sugar, 5 grams of salt and 50 grams of blended food, usually corn and soya. Over 18 months ending in December, WFP's needs total 102,515 mt for 366,000 refugees in Ethiopia, including 275,000 Somalis, 63,000 Sudanese, 18,000 Djiboutians and 8,700 Kenyans. During the period, WFP also distributed food packages to 47,000 Ethiopians who have returned from exile in neighboring countries. This program costs WFP $46.3 million — about half of which represents the actual food value; the rest is for transport, handling, storage and administrative services. WFP spends roughly 28 U.S. cents a day to feed a refugee in Ethiopia.

In July, WFP announced that it had a shortfall of 42,000 mt in its program for Ethiopia, saying donors had made available only 60,320 mt.

Thus the cereal ration was cut. This was a severe blow since the wheat grain was in fact the only regular ration the refugees had been receiving. The 'ideal' food basket, including sugar and salt, had long been unavailable. The delivery of oil had been held up for months because local authorities wanted to impose a levy on oil. This problem had been sorted out and oil again was being distributed in the camps in late July.

Aggravating the situation of the Somali refugees is severe malnutrition. To lessen the impact of a further reduction in rations in the camps and at the same time address malnutrition problems, both WFP and UNHCR launched a supplementary feeding program. Children under five years and pregnant and lactating mothers now receive weekly dry rations consisting of blended food such as corn and soya mix in addition to the general ration. Severely malnourished children are enlisted in therapeutic feeding programs in hospitals where high-energy milk is provided.

UNHCR and its implementing partner in Ethiopia, the government Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA), run the emergency feeding programs. The two agencies have also agreed to deploy additional nutrition workers and to train them in managing health and nutritional emergencies. The posting of a senior advisor from the British agency Save the Children Fund (SCF) has been recommended to supervise the blanket feeding operation and screening of children. SCF had been operating in Hartisheik before ARRA took over its feeding programs for vulnerable people.

Appeals have been made to donors to enable WFP to meet its cereal shortfall. The Italian government has said it would provide an additional $2 million to WFP. Other donors, including the European Community, have responded positively to pleas for contributions.

***Workers store food delivered by the World Food Program, which supplies the refugee camps.***

UNHCR/W. Scott

Health

# Familiar images

It doesn't look like tiny Kadar Hussein, a bundle of skin and bones, is going to make it. Since his birth 13 months ago, he has been in and out of a hospital in Hartisheik, a camp for Somali refugees in Ethiopia. A nurse says he is suffering from tuberculosis. His 19-year-old mother, Sofia Mahmud, says the boy has been in hospital this time for three months, but his condition has not improved.

The two hospitals at the Hartisheik camp provide evidence of Somalia's recent, nightmarish past: babies, like Kadar Hussein, with spidery limbs and distended bellies; sickly old men lining up for vaccinations; women scrambling for a bowl of porridge at feeding centers.

The scenes at the hospitals reflect the poor health conditions at Hartisheik, which is experiencing serious malnutrition. It is one problem that UNHCR is watching in its camps in Ethiopia and elsewhere. Measles, diarrhea, acute respiratory infections and malaria are also major problems in refugee situations, often accounting for 60 to 80 percent of deaths.

In Hartisheik, the government Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA), is primarily responsible for health care. It is assisted by UNHCR, which provides medicine and equipment. Hartisheik's two hospitals have a total of 71 beds and 141 workers, including two doctors and 10 nurses, 13 health assistants and midwives, two laboratory technicians, two pharmacists and five feeding supervisors.

Health risks are greatest at the start of massive refugee influxes when governments are often ill-prepared to handle emergencies and require a tremendous amount of international assistance. For example, in July 1994, when about 1 million Rwandan refugees poured into eastern Zaire over four days, more than 50,000 people died of cholera, dysentery and other diseases. UNHCR had to resort to extraordinary measures to stabilize the situation, requesting the world's major powers to bring in their armies to help provide emergency assistance. Water tankers were flown in, food, medicine and soap were airlifted and heavy equipment was mobilized to bury the dead in the hard volcanic soil in Zaire's Goma camps.

As emergencies at the outset of refugee movements shift to routine care and maintenance, UNHCR doctors ensure that health and nutrition policies are implemented by host governments and non-governmental organizations. Community and health workers closely monitor camp conditions.

Preventive health care programs are UNHCR's priority worldwide. It has two health specialists and one nutritionist at its headquarters in Geneva who provide technical expertise in health and nutrition programs. Whenever required, UNHCR encourages its implementing partners to undertake immunization campaigns against measles and to improve environmental health in the camps as well as the nutritional status of the refugees.

> Preventive health care is UNHCR's priority worldwide.

Despite all these interventions and strategies, efforts at improving health care are sometimes frustrated by other factors inherent in a camp situation. These include overcrowding, which facilitates the transmission of infectious diseases; poor nutrition and consequent lower immunity; lack of clean water; poor sanitation; and inadequate shelter.

In May, a joint survey by UNHCR and ARRA found that malnutrition levels among children less than five years old in Hartisheik had reached an alarming 20 percent. To improve the situation, UNHCR and ARRA launched a blanket feeding program for all children under five and pregnant and lactating mothers, which was integrated with the existing health services.

In this program, beneficiaries are provided with a weekly dry take-home ration of 1.7 kg of blended food in addition to WFP's basic food supply.

In July, there were about 100 children in the feeding centers at Hartisheik's hospitals. The number is small compared with the victims of the civil war and famine in Somalia which claimed more than 300,000 lives and prompted a 21-nation intervention force led by the United States to undertake "Operation Restore Hope" in the early 90s. But for the children, the pain and suffering is the same.

Dr. Dereje Abera, ARRA's medical director at the camp, describes the situation in Hartisheik as "totally pathetic," citing lack of water and reports that refugees sell part of their food rations to meet other household needs. Although Abera claims the death rate is low, aid workers dispute this, saying that refugees do not normally report deaths because that would mean giving up valuable food ration coupons.

Kadar Hussein's mother, Sofia, admits she sometimes sells not only a part of her regular food ration, but also at times the supplementary assistance such as skimmed milk to buy things needed in her house. Sofia Mahmud has six other children to support in addition to Kadar Hussein. Her husband long ago abandoned her. In situations like this, Abera says, even the best health care program can fail.

***UNHCR is slowly gaining headway in a campaign against female circumcision in Somali refugee camps.***

Women

# Video versus tradition

Medina Hassan, 55 years old, her face creased with age and the trauma of eight years of living in a refugee camp, has been mutilating girls all her life.

"We used to be the mothers of the nation," the lifelong circumcisor said.

In early 1996, Medina Hassan says, she threw her time-worn blades away. They were knives that had cut more than 3,000 girls (perhaps as many as 15,000; she has lost all count). Sometimes as many as 10 mothers would come each week seeking her services for their daughters, who normally ranged in age from six to 11.

Medina performed the deep infibulation procedure, traditional in Somalia, for more than 30 years, before settling at Ethiopia's Hartisheik refugee camp after fleeing her native Gebile. The practice involves cutting off the clitoris, cutting the vulva and then sewing the two sides together to leave a small channel through which urine and the monthly menstruation can pass. Sometimes mistakes are made and the wound seals entirely, necessitating a repeat of the operation. Frequently, infection sets in, and sometimes the girl dies.

In 1993, UNHCR, together with the National Committee on Traditional Practices in Ethiopia (NCTPE), ▶

▶ instituted a training and information campaign in Hartisheik that focused on female genital mutilation. The campaign targeted circumcisors, traditional birth attendants, religious leaders and community elders. The program explained to women participants that the urinary, kidney and menstruation discomfort and complications most of them experience throughout their lives are a direct result of the rite of passage they suffered as children — a rite that ended with clumsy stitches smeared with egg to cover their bleeding wounds.

Thanks in part to that training program, and an emotional video that has been widely shown both to men and women, Hartisheik and other refugee camps have seen the custom of infibulation change. Since Medina Hassan first took part in the workshops, perhaps hundreds of girls have been spared deep infibulation. Amina Sharif, NCTPE's project coordinator, says the three main female circumcisors in Hartisheik camp — Medina Hassan among them — have ceased the brutal old practice. But they do continue to practice a modified version of female genital mutilation.

"Before, I used to get a lot of money, 100 birr ($15) for a infibulation," Medina Hassan said. "Nowadays, I am getting 40 to 50 birr for a little cut."

These days, Medina Hassan pricks a girl's clitoris enough to draw blood. Mothers must provide new razor blades for each child (thus preventing some unnecessary infections). This modified form of female genital mutilation is known as *sunna* among the Somalis, and NCTPE (as well as UNHCR) hopes it too will stop. "We want to destroy completely the culture of mutilating women," said NCTPE's Amina Sharif.

Hassan says she decided to stop inflicting deep infibulation on young children when she reflected on the suffering she herself had undergone. She says that she is still sometimes asked to perform infibulation by mothers in the camp. She refuses. "There are still traditionalists in the camp. When they want me to make the deep cut and I refuse, they get angry," she said.

But ending mutilation altogether will take some time, Medina Hassan says.

"It is our tradition," Hassan said, noting that she recently performed the simplified procedure on her granddaughter. "I have never seen a woman saying, 'I don't want my child touched.'"

The NCTPE's Amina Sharif believes that education is the way to halt mutilation, but she says that workshops and posters are not enough. The circumcisors must have something else to do, and Medina Hassan, although advanced in years, agrees.

"I tell you frankly, the circumcisor earns money. We can only change if we have another job," she said. "That and education — then you can eradicate circumcision."

Women who practice genital mutilation earn vast sums by Somali standards, whether at home or in refugee camps. Although Somali culture is clearly flexible enough to adapt to less brutal practices — and may one day be ready to stop mutilating young girls altogether — it may be hard to find replacement activities that can generate the same income for the circumcisors.

Meanwhile, deep infibulation is still practiced among Hartisheik's refugees, Medina Hassan says. Traditionalists will always find circumcisors willing to perform the old procedure. Despite the best efforts of field staff and NGOs, young refugee children in UNHCR's care will continue to be mutilated, and sometimes even killed.

"I tell you frankly, the circumcisor earns money. We can only change if we have another job."

Education

# Escape from ignorance

Within six months of the Somali refugee influx into eastern Ethiopia's Hartisheik camp in 1988, primary schools were organized for children. Classes were held under plastic sheeting that did not last very long, recalls Geert van de Casteele, UNHCR's education officer.

"The eastern region is in a dusty area. Windy. No trees. Children made holes in the plastic sheeting. After three or four months, the schools were gone and had to be replaced," said van de Casteele.

Lack of water in the semi-arid region prevented the construction of school buildings until 1991, when prefabricated materials were brought into the camp. Two schools have since been constructed. In the last school year, which ended in early July, the schools had an enrolment of 1,304 children — 1,083 boys and 221 girls — both refugees and locals.

UNHCR's policy is to ensure that refugee children have access to education, which is recognized as a basic human right. It funds governments and non-governmental organizations to construct and operate schools for refugees. Globally, more than 500,000 children benefit from UNHCR's programs for primary and secondary schools, says Margaret Sinclair, UNHCR's senior education officer. UNHCR also supports literacy classes and vocational training for adults.

Courses offered in these schools normally follow the curriculum in the refugees' country of origin, using familiar languages of instruction. In countries where repatriation cannot be foreseen in the immediate future, consultations are then held among host governments, refugee representatives and UNHCR to see if a "mix" of subjects incorporating elements in both the studies programs of the countries of origin and the host government can be offered to the refugee children. Help is given by UNHCR wherever local schools can accommodate refugee children.

In general, host countries allow the education of refugee children. Shortly after 250,000 Rwandan refugees flooded into Kagera district in Tanzania in April 1994, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNESCO and private agencies, including the German GTZ, immediately organized schools in a unique inter-agency operation, conducting classes under plastic sheeting.

However, there are exceptions, even in the Great Lakes region, host to 1.7 million Rwandan refugees. In the eastern Zaire camps holding one million Rwandan refugees, there is no education for refugee children. Since the Rwandan refugee influx into Zaire in July 1994, primary schools had been operated on an ad hoc basis by refugee volunteers. They received some modest international support from various agencies, including UNHCR. But these schools have been closed since February when the Zairians decided to shut down all commercial activities in the Rwandan refugee camps in an attempt to encourage people to return to Rwanda.

UNHCR is now negotiating with Zairian authorities to reopen the schools. Apart from the fact that education is a basic right under various international legal conventions, the out-of-school youths are contributing to increasing insecurity and criminal incidents in the camps.

In Hartisheik, keeping the students occupied is one of the concerns of refugee elders when schools are closed for the annual two-month vacation. Volunteer teachers hold classes in makeshift backyard schools in the camp.

One of these volunteers is Mussa Abdilahi Abid, 27, who calls his small hut made of twigs, leaves and rags the "Almis School" after a popular mountain resort in Somalia. Mussa, whose university studies were interrupted by the outbreak of civil war in Somalia, says this is to remind his pupils that there is such a place in Somalia that the refugees can return to and be proud of.

On a Saturday afternoon, several dozen Somali children sat on stones as Mussa gave lessons in English. His program also includes mathematics, science and readings from the Koran. He uses books he brought with him on his escape from Somalia in 1988 when the Somali refugees first flooded into Ethiopia.

"I hope to be able to help these children escape the ignorance that has made them refugees," says Mussa.

> UNHCR's policy is to ensure that refugee children have access to education, which is recognized as a basic human right.

# Nary a drop to drink

UNHCR/W. Stoll

***The search for water is a continuing process to ease an acute shortage in the camps in eastern Ethiopia's dry plain.***

More than 275,000 Somali refugees eke out an existence in the eight refugee camps of eastern Ethiopia, a region that historically supported only nomads.

A major problem in Hartisheik and the other camps is water — or rather the lack of it.

The water ration in the eight camps averages five liters a day — far short of UNHCR's global target of 20 liters per day for each refugee. Hartisheik's doctor, Dr. Dereje Abera, says this shortage of water is a contributing factor in the camp's malnutrition rate, which is close to 20 percent for children attending the clinic.

In any refugee camp, a good, reliable source of clean water must be available. It's a basic need, but as places like Hartisheik, or Goma, Zaire, illustrate, water can never be taken for granted. It's a matter of life or death. The provision of adequate, clean water is such a serious requirement that UNHCR employs full-time water engineers to work with other specialist camp planners to ensure supply. But sometimes, for reasons outside UNHCR's control, refugee camps end up on impossibly poor sites.

Eastern Ethiopia is one of those places. After a downpour, its porous

soil sucks up all the rain water and the sun bakes the earth until it cracks. On this harsh land live the 59,000 refugees of Hartisheik.

In 1988, when the first few thousand refugees arrived in this parched region, UNHCR and CARE set up an emergency water transport system using tanker trucks that brought the water 80 kms to Hartisheik.

When Somalia's civil war erupted in force a year later, sending up to 400,000 refugees into Hartisheik and other hastily assembled camps in the region, UNHCR struggled to find a better solution.

Test wells were dug around Hartisheik. But, half a kilometer down and hundreds of thousands of dollars later, the pipes came up dry. Finally, UNHCR located a new water source in a test well 240 meters beneath the Jerrer valley — 40 kms from Hartisheik.

Eight years later CARE tankers still ferry 690,000 liters of water a day to 159,000 beneficiaries in Hartisheik, Kebri Beyah, Teferi Ber and Darwanaji camps. Since 1988, UNHCR has spent some $20 million on water transport — $2.5 million every year. Donations have already started to come in for a 22-km pipeline which UNHCR is planning to build from the Jerrer valley boreholes to Kebri Beyah, which is located halfway to Hartisheik. Both refugees and returning Ethiopian refugees would benefit. A pipeline could halve the tankers' travel time.

If UNHCR were to help only refugees, additional tension with local communities would be created. So, in addition to the planned pipeline, UNHCR has worked to improve the water situation across eastern Ethiopia. Water catchments built with UNHCR funding dot the region, helping livestock, local residents and refugees alike. Shallow well projects and an experimental 'Haffir' dam (a Sudanese-designed reservoir) are also under construction.

But meanwhile, in the camps, a lack of funds means water is wasted in leaky, 8-year-old distribution networks that receive only minimal maintenance. With UNHCR's care and maintenance budget diminishing year by year, Ethiopia's Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA) has little money to upgrade and streamline aging distribution lines that stretch through camps like Hartisheik, now half-empty following the spontaneous repatriation of some 200,000 refugees.

The situation is perhaps less depressing elsewhere in Africa. With adequate donor support for other programs, UNHCR has found the funds necessary to bring water to many camps in zones which are just as parched.

UNHCR/M. Tzovaras

***Somali refugees and Ethiopian returnees dig a water catchment basin under a UNHCR project to provide jobs and incomes.***

In July 1994, when nearly a quarter of a million Rwandan refugees fled into Kibumba, Zaire — a town built on hard volcanic rock just north of Goma — aid workers trying to deliver clean water in the face of a massive cholera epidemic faced enormous challenges. It was a challenge that UNHCR and its partners eventually met. Today, tanker trucks run back and forth to Lake Kivu, 30 kms to the south, and deliver at least 10 liters of treated water daily to every refugee in Kibumba.

The message is clear: no funding means little or no precious water. A real danger is that Hartisheik's water problems will be repeated elsewhere as funds dry up and refugee populations are forgotten.

Self-reliance

# 'Think Solutions'

The small vegetable gardens around the Somali huts in Hartisheik are a testament to the refugees' efforts to help themselves. Here and there, chickens and goats roam about. They are familiar scenes in refugee settings no matter how inhospitable — be it in the dry plain of eastern Ethiopia, where Hartisheik is located, or the lava rock formations in eastern Zaire that are home to one million Rwandan refugees.

UNHCR makes every effort to help the refugees become self-reliant, whenever the opportunity presents itself in asylum countries or in countries where they have returned after a life in exile. Assistance programs include the distribution of agricultural seeds and tools, and income-generating activities such as micro-credit schemes for sewing, small livestock, food processing, pottery and carpentry. These are relatively small initiatives and the benefits are limited. But in areas where innovative projects are undertaken with the cooperation of governments and appropriate funding by donors, they improve life for refugees and their host communities.

In the post-Cold War era, it has become increasingly difficult to raise funds to care for and maintain refugees in many countries, says Larbi Mebtouche, UNHCR's senior economist and planner. "Beyond the emergency phase, donors are demanding solutions to refugee problems," he said. "The buzzword now is think solutions to set up a strategy for self-reliance at the earliest stage." Mebtouche says UNHCR spends some $13 million to $14 million annually for income-generating activities in an effort to get rid of the dependency syndrome inherent in most refugee situations.

Some imaginative solutions have been found in some countries, says Mebtouche. He refers to a program for the 50,000 Vietnamese refugees in five provinces in southern China for which UNHCR used to spend $2 million to $3 million annually. Three years ago, instead of spending the money on regular care and maintenance, a credit program was put in place and loans were given to factories which in turn employed refugees. The loans are now being repaid.

In 1992, UNHCR initiated a "cross-mandate approach" to the massive assistance program needed in eastern Ethiopia — the most depressed region in the country — to ease the situation of the Somali refugees, Ethiopian returnees and internally displaced people who were all destitute. At that time, food was scarce and bandits hijacked relief trucks, which made the delivery of aid risky in the area. The UNHCR efforts called for the pooling of resources of all U.N. agencies so that aid could be delivered not only to the refugee camps, but to all the communities benefiting from U.N. help. However, lack of funding hobbled the project and only UNHCR, the UN Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia and the World Food Program remain there with a regular aid project.

Also in 1992 in Kenya, UNHCR drew up a plan for cross border operations to stem the flow of Somali refugees into the country. The objective was to stabilize the situation inside Somalia and create conditions for the eventual return and reintegration of the refugees. UNHCR established five outposts in the southern region of Somalia. They monitored the security situation there, distributed food and shelter materials and supervised the repair of basic economic and physical infrastructure. Quick impact projects, or QIPs, were initiated. They included the rehabilitation of water supply systems, digging of new wells, repair of roads, sanitation, health, education and government facilities, agriculture, livestock, forestry and other productive activities. The QIPs were inspired by the highly successful self-sufficiency programs for refugees in Latin America in the 1980s and are now incorporated in UNHCR's activities in most refugee situations.

In Uganda, the government has made available some 5,000 square kilometers of land to help Sudanese refugees rebuild their lives by integrating with local communities. UNHCR provides development assistance, such as roads, wells and health centers, to benefit the resettled refugees and local people alike. There are some 400,000 Sudanese refugees from Africa's longest running civil war. Their plight has been overshadowed by other conflicts that have hit the headlines. So they have been scraping along with U.N. assistance in Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, Zaire and the Central African Republic.

"There is no way you can think of sending back or encouraging people to go back to a situation which they ran away from. You see, the situation in southern Sudan has been permanently volatile. So, we thought that instead of always hoping to ask for food from the international community or from UNHCR, why don't we think in terms of integrating many of these refugees," said Jaber Bidandi-Ssali, Uganda's minister of local government.

Uganda's generosity is rare in a world where compassion for refu-

In the post-Cold War era, it has become increasingly difficult to raise funds to care for refugees.

***Refugee women submit proposals for income-generating projects at a meeting with Ethiopian camp administrators.***

gees appears to be waning — even in Africa, which is known for its liberal asylum policies. Countries are paying a heavy price for hosting massive numbers of refugees and are increasingly seeking compensation that UNHCR and the international community can never fully cover.

Last January, UNHCR and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) proposed a $70 million program to repair damage to the environment and infrastructure in the Great Lakes region countries with Rwandan refugees. The program aims to stop unregulated wood cutting and encourages reforestation while creating productive income-generating opportunities for both refugees and local residents. It also involves the rehabilitation of roads, ports and communication facilities, health and education services and income-generation. Several small projects have been undertaken on a bilateral basis, but implementation has been slow. UNHCR is even having difficulty raising money for its basic assistance programs this year.

The idea of linking refugee assistance with development aid has been considered by UNHCR since the 1980s, when an international conference of African countries raised, for the first time, the issue of repairing refugee damage to local infrastructure. In addition to purely humanitarian aid, UNHCR was urged to promote some development projects in the host communities in cooperation with development-oriented agencies. In 1986, UNHCR launched a 12-year project in Pakistan designed to create employment for refugees and Pakistanis and rehabilitate damage to the country's forests, roads and water facilities. UNHCR raised $86 million for this project, which was administered by the World Bank. The project has paid off and new funding is being sought by the government to consolidate the assets created in refugee areas. A similar project was successfully carried out jointly by UNHCR and IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development) in Iran between 1989 and 1995.

In the era of superpower spheres of interest, the project in Pakistan was attractive to donors. But in countries with little or no strategic interest, donors are hard to find. For UNHCR, today's challenge is to find creative ways to make refugees and their host communities self-reliant while making programs cost effective and self-sustaining. Says Mebtouche: "We have to prod the refugees, make them productive. You cannot continue to perpetuate a cult of dependency until it hits refugees and the organization that this cannot go on indefinitely and then you face the question: 'When do you stop?'"

# Preventing and repairing the damage

The Ethiopian camel and donkey drivers along the dirt road from Jijiga to Hartisheik have a common complaint against the Somali refugees: they have chopped down trees over a wide expanse of eastern Ethiopia's dry savannah.

"They are brothers," says Abdul Abdi Ali, 40, as he heads toward the market in the refugee town of Hartisheik to sell firewood loaded on the backs of his camels. "They have cut down our trees. But we have no personal problems with them."

Since the influx of the Somali refugees in 1988, the areas around their camps have been severely eroded. Now, both refugees and Ethiopians have to travel miles in search of wood for fuel and shelter. The long-term consequences are expected to be costly for the host community, which will bear the burden long after the Somalis are gone.

The situation in eastern Ethiopia is similar to the predicament experienced by other countries caring for large numbers of refugees — shrinking forests, poaching in game parks, pollution of water resources and soil erosion.

Environmental damage as a result of refugees' presence has been a major UNHCR concern for years. But the need to address immediate survival needs in emergency refugee situations often overshadowed projects to ease ecological problems in the past.

Donors recognize that moderate expenditure on environmental protection can save enormous costs in rehabilitation of damaged lands after repatriation. For this reason, UNHCR has facilitated activities of its implementing partners to provide some Rwandan refugee camps in the Great Lakes with fuel wood; to distribute fuel-efficient stoves in nine countries, including Kenya, Malawi, Somalia, Uganda and Zimbabwe; and to set up tree-planting programs in Malawi and Pakistan. The two reforestation programs, started in the 1980s, have also provided refugees and host communities with jobs.

In 1995, UNHCR issued a policy paper calling for the prevention and mitigation of ecological damage and the integration of efficient measures to deal with it in all levels of refugee operations. The initiatives require the participation of both refugees and host communities. This year, UNHCR released "Environmental Guidelines" to implement the policy, proposing the deployment of experts in the field and the education of both refugees and their host communities on the need to protect their fragile surroundings. Increasing attention is being paid to environmental planning. UNHCR has developed an environmental database at its headquarters in Geneva to support its work worldwide, including such areas as Ethiopia.

UNHCR/B. Sokol

***UNHCR supports a tree nursery in Jijiga town under a government reforestation program in eastern Ethiopia.***

The regions around the Somali refugee camps in eastern Ethiopia have always been fragile. Abdi Hashi Al-'irahman, 38, who heads the South East Rangelands Project (SERP), says British colonizers had once attempted to make a large part of Hartisheik and its surroundings a game preserve, allowing only limited grazing. So, for years, the sparse vegetation and forest cover was protected.

"Then the refugees came and started to cut down trees and soon there was no forest left," said Abdirahman. "The locals also chopped trees and made charcoal to sell to the refugees."

Abdirahman's office, which is part of the Agriculture Ministry, is promoting tree planting to counteract the ecological damage in the country's eastern region. SERP is heavily funded by the African Development Bank. It has five seedling centers to which UNHCR has contributed $2 million to promote tree planting.

To ease pressure on scarce water sources, UNHCR has been constructing water catchment basins and wells. It is now laying down pipes to bring water from one of its main sources in the region, in the Jerer valley, for the Somali refugee camp at Kebri Beyeh that also would benefit the Ethiopians.

# When it's time to go home

When peace has returned and the fears that drove refugees into exile are gone, no one needs to tell them it is time to go home. Many of them do — on their own. But some refuse to return even though security concerns may no longer be so apparent. Often, it is because they now have a new kind of fear — that of going back to a ruined homeland and starting over again with very little. This is what most of the Somali refugees still in Ethiopia fear most. UNHCR is helping them overcome these apprehensions.

In early August, 10 Somali refugee representatives from three camps in eastern Ethiopia — Hartisheik, Teferi Ber and Darwanaji — went on a 10-day visit to northwest Somalia to find out for themselves what many of their compatriots already know: that order seems to have been restored in several areas, especially in Boroma region. Some Somali refugees in Ethiopia regularly visit their hometowns, traveling on buses or on foot on roads that are regarded as safe.

"They found that the security situation is not an obstacle to repatriation, especially in the regions west of Hargeisa," said Tariq Muftic, UNHCR's repatriation officer in Jijiga, who accompanied the 10 refugees on their visit. But he conceded that the region needs assistance to rebuild the war-devastated infrastructure and all the areas visited are still in need of further rehabilitation. Moreover, they will need assistance in food, water, health and education services. "In many villages, the houses have been blown away and they need plastic sheeting and other building materials when they go back."

UNHCR has spent $13.8 million on rehabilitation and integration projects in northwest Somalia since 1992, constructing and repairing schools, water facilities and hospitals. Over a third of that amount was spent on clearing land mines in potential returnee sites. In its operations worldwide, whenever UNHCR sees an opportunity for repatriation, it invests in the short-term development of such areas so as to accelerate the repatriation of refugees.

***A snack bar and bakery run by Somali returnees at Galcayo in northwest Somalia.***

Large numbers of the 1.7 million Mozambican refugees in six border countries began returning home spontaneously after a peace agreement was signed in October 1992 to end 16 years of civil war. To further accelerate the returns, UNHCR decided to distribute food in known returnee sites in Mozambique, instead of the camps in the asylum countries. To help the refugees become self-sufficient, UNHCR distributed agricultural seeds and tools to the Mozambican returnees and repaired infrastructure. About 1.3 million Mozambican refugees returned spontaneously from the asylum countries, mainly from Malawi. UNHCR helped bring the remaining 400,000 refugees home by train, bus, ship and plane. The repatriation program for Mozambique was the biggest UNHCR has so far undertaken in Africa and was completed ahead of schedule.

Some Somali refugees in Ethiopia regularly visit their hometowns, traveling on roads regarded as safe.

UNHCR has been planning a repatriation operation for more than 300,000 Angolan refugees since the signing of a November 1994 peace accord that ended 20 years of civil war. Some 24,000 Angolans have returned spontaneously, but because of the slow pace of the peace process, UNHCR has been unable to organize returns from the asylum countries, planned to begin this year.

In central Africa, a regional conference in February 1995 agreed that voluntary repatriation is the only viable solution to the refugee crisis in the region. Countries of asylum and countries of origin agreed to create conditions that would accelerate the return of some 1.7 million Rwandan refugees. Large-scale repatriation has not happened because of problems in the asylum countries and in Rwanda. In the camps, UNHCR shows videos about life back home in an attempt to counter misinformation by extremist forces blocking repatriation. In Rwanda, while the government has encouraged repatriation, it still has to improve its justice system to build up confidence in the camps. In the meantime, UNHCR has been helping the Rwandan government build shelters for the returnees and repairing schools, clinics and water sources. It is also organizing visits by refugees to Rwanda — a measure similar to that undertaken in the camps in eastern Ethiopia to promote voluntary repatriation.

UNHCR made several plans to repatriate the Somali refugees in Ethiopia, beginning in 1992, but these were repeatedly frustrated by outbreaks of violence in northwest Somalia. For example, in 1994, a pilot project for the return of 10,000 refugees was drawn up, but a new round of fighting broke out in northwest Somalia and torpedoed the project. Instead of repatriating refugees, a new influx of 90,000 Somalis swept into eastern Ethiopia.

Since January 1995, after order returned in northwest Somalia, UNHCR again looked at repatriation. The plan now is to give the returnees the necessary transportation back to Somalia and to provide them with reintegration assistance packages such as blankets, jerrycans and a supply of food for approximately nine months.

UNHCR has issued an appeal for $12.6 million for the repatriation and integration this year of 10,000 Somali refugees from Ethiopia, 35,000 from Kenya and 1,000 from Djibouti. The amount also covers continuing programs to help refugees who had returned earlier to Somalia. During their trip to northwest Somalia in August, the 10 refugee representatives were assured by local officials that they could return without preconditions and would be welcomed. They were told that their return would encourage donors to help the region with financial aid. One local official scolded the refugees for depending on handouts.

"You used to be hardworking and now you have been reduced to begging. Now you do not even know how to fetch water. You have been used to having everything delivered to your doorstep," one local governor said. "Life is hard and resources are few, but let's share what we have and build our country together."

# The last to leave

Amenah Abdi came to Hartisheik in 1988 when a rebellion broke out in northwest Somalia and forced her family of seven to flee. She was then 12 years old and was among the mainly women and children who swept into Ethiopia at the rate of 4,000 a day over a three-month period beginning in May.

Now a young mother of two children, Amenah Abdi remains at Hartisheik, waiting for an opportunity to return to Somalia. She has been abandoned by her husband but feels that if she could get some assistance to help her earn a living she could start life all over again in her country.

Amenah Abdi's eyes light up reminiscing about the good times she had growing up in Hargeisa, Somalia's second largest city. She misses "drinking milk, playing with my brothers." She longs for the comforts of city life that are now denied her two sons, one of whom is suffering from tuberculosis and has been confined at the Hartisheik hospital for 25 days.

Amenah Abdi shares an urban background with most of the 59,000 Somali refugees in Hartisheik. They are former civil servants, shop owners, skilled workers and professionals. Women comprise 22.4 percent of the population, men 22.7 percent and children aged 18 and below 54.7 percent. The breakdown reflects roughly the demographic picture of the 275,994 Somalis in the eight refugee camps in Ethiopia.

A large majority of the several hundred thousand Somali refugees who initially came to Hartisheik were pastoral nomads who had returned to Somalia spontaneously. The more affluent Somali refugees who have money and capital are also back in their country and have set up shops.

But the very poor like Amenah Abdi are stuck in Hartisheik.

Amenah Abdi tried to go home to Hargeisa in early 1994. But clan fighting broke out later that year and she had to return to Hartisheik.

She is particularly vulnerable because she heads a household alone. There are many women like her in the camps whose husbands either are dead or have abandoned them. Special programs are drawn up for these female heads of households, but their number cannot be pinpointed because no extensive census has been conducted in recent years.

Another victim of that 1994 fighting was Hinda Mohammad, who had to flee to Hartisheik with her husband and newborn daughter. She had managed to live in Hargeisa despite the turmoil of the earlier years, but the 1994 clashes forced her to become a refugee.

"I was living with friends. There was no food. My situation became so desperate. I had to go to a place where I could get some help," said Hinda.

Unfortunately, Hinda arrived in January 1995, when government officials stopped registering refugees for food rations after peace returned to large parts of the Hargeisa region. The officials say even local Ethiopians attempted to register as refugees and that it is very difficult to distinguish locals from refugees. There are suspicions that a large number of the inhabitants of Hartisheik and other refugee camps are locals.

So, Hinda is helped by neighbors who receive regular food rations. To supplement her food needs, Hinda tends a corn and vegetable garden beside her hut. Her husband has a wheelbarrow and sells water to other refugee families. He earns 3 to 4 birrs a day — about 60 U.S. cents — when there is enough demand. The money is used to buy kerosene for the lamp, sugar and tea and a cup of milk for their child.

"During the rainy season, when we can make money delivering water, there is one — maybe two — meals a day. But in summer, when there's not enough water and no work to do, we spend a day without eating. We stay in the hut, lie down and sleep," said Hinda.

*A Somali woman at Hartisheik hospital nurses her child afflicted with tuberculosis.*

# Handicap International receives Nansen Medal

Handicap International, a Franco-Belgian non-governmental organization, received this year's Nansen Medal for its outstanding work with refugees. Dr. Jean-Baptiste Richardier, co-director and co-founder of Handicap International (standing), and Patrick Segal, the organization's vice president who also is France's inter-ministerial delegate for handicapped people (left), received the award from High Commissioner Sadako Ogata in a ceremony on 4 October in Geneva. Handicap International was established in 1982 in response to the refugee crisis in Cambodia. It has since been helping people disabled by wars or landmines in 35 countries. The Nansen Medal is named after Norwegian diplomat and explorer Fridtjof Nansen, the first High Commissioner for Refugees under the League of Nations. It was created to focus attention on refugees and to give new impetus to the need for international support for forcibly displaced people. The Nansen Medal this year includes a financial award of $100,000 — a gift from the Norwegian government to be spent on a project for refugees.

UNHCR A. Hollmann

# Rotary International honors High Commissioner

High Commissioner Sadako Ogata received the Rotary Award for World Understanding during Rotary International's 87th convention in Calgary, Canada, in June. She was cited for the "inspiration, hope and security" she has provided to many people through her refugee assistance efforts. Ogata announced the award's $100,000 grant would fund an environmental program for refugee children in east and central Africa. Previous winners of the award include Pope John Paul II and former U.S. President Jimmy Carter. Standing beside Ogata at a photo session following the awarding ceremonies is Chris Jenkins, an American volunteer chosen to work in UNHCR's Camp Sadako project in Kenya, which enables young people to experience life with refugees.

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# THANK YOU

Africa has too many refugees, more than 5 million of them. Ordinary people, just like you and me, except that conflict and hate have robbed them of their homes, their land, their possessions and their loved ones.

Many have nothing left but their dignity.

But fortunately for them, Africa also has more than its share of warmth and kindness. Here every man is a brother. Every woman, a sister. Every hungry traveller is made welcome. And every motherless child is our child.

It's a deep tradition that cuts across our many ethnic differences, and one for which UNHCR and Africa's innocent outcasts are profoundly grateful.

Because without your tolerance we couldn't carry on sheltering and protecting the refugees under our care.

So until the day comes when they can return to their homes, let's not forget that the refugees among us are still part of our family.

The human family.

Thank you.

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20